

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1159

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 11311

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BENC, ETEL, IV, FR, IBRD

SUBJECT: IVORY COAST/US/France: CONFLICT

RE CONTRACT FOR CENTRAL SWITCHING OFFICES; APPROACH TO FINANCE

MINISTER BEDIE

REF: A) ABIDJAN 11111; B) STATE 285421

1. AMBASSADOR CALLED ON FINANCE MINISTER BEDIE YESTERDAY AND, AMONG OTHER SUBJECTS, RAISED QUESTION OF SWITCHING CONTRACT AND EXPRESSED OUR CONCERN OVER REPORTS THAT CONTRACT BEING AWARDED TO CGCT IN CONTRA-VENTION IBRD GUIDELINES. RECALLING BEDIE'S DISCUSSIONS WITH IBRD REPS IN MANILA, AMBASSADOR ASKED FINANCE MINISTER WHAT STATUS OF MATTER WAS AT PRESENT TIME.

2. BEDIE, WHO CLEARLY DID NOT RELISH FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THIS SENSITIVE PROBLEM, SAID QUICKLY THAT HE HAD UNDERTAKEN IN MANILA TO SEE THAT FINAL DECISION ON SWITCHING CONTRACT WAS NOT TAKEN BEFORE HE RETURNED TO ABIDJAN AND HAD OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS SUBJECT WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY. HE HAD NOT, HE SAID, AGREED IN MANILA TO CANCEL THE CONTRACT. WHILE GOIC UNDERSTOOD IBRD'S VIEWPOINT, IVORIANS BELIEVED THERE WERE SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED IN SWITCHING CONTRACT WHICH JUSTIFIED AWARD TO CGCT. PTT MINISTER BANGALI KONE WOULD BE IN WASHINGTON WITH TEAM OF EXPERTS

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DECEMBER 8 - 10 AT WHICH TIME IVORIAN POSITION WOULD BE

PRESENTED IN DETAIL TO IBRD.

3. AMBASSADOR ASKED BEDIE WHETHER QUESTION WAS OPEN OR CLOSED AS FAR AS DECISION TO AWARD BID TO CGCT WAS CONCERNED. FINANCE MINISTER HEDGED HIS REPLY BY SAYING THAT IT WOULD BE PREMATURE TO CHARACTERIZE STATUS OF AWARD UNTIL KONE HAD DISCUSSED MATTER WITH IBRD IN WASHINGTON. HE LEFT AMBASSADOR WITH LITTLE DOUBT THAT, AS FAR AS BEDIE IS CONCERNED, GOIC WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO AWARD CONTRACT TO NORTH ELECTRIC, ALTHOUGH HE COMMENTED THAT IVORIANS WOULD NOT WISH IBRD PARTICIPATION TO BE JEOPARDIZED AS A RESULT.

4. COMMENT: WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK THAT WHAT BEDIE HAD IN MIND IN MAKING LATTER POINT WAS THAT GOIC WOULD RATHER ITSELF WITHDRAW REQUEST FOR IBRD FINANCING OF SWITCHING OFFICES THAN RUN RISK OF LOSING IBRD SUPPORT FOR ENTIRE TELEPHONE IMPROVEMENT PACKAGE. NOTHING THAT BEDIE SAID TO AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED DISPOSITION BY GOIC TO RECONSIDER AWARD TO CGCT. THAT PROPOSITION CAN HOWEVER ONLY BE TESTED BY IBRD'S HOLDING THE LINE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH KONE NEXT WEEK. MEANWHILE, WE DO NOT RPT NOT THINK THAT NORTH ELECTRIC'S INTERESTS WOULD BE SERVED BY ATTEMPTING TO TURN KONE AROUND BEFORE HE TALKS WITH IBRD. AT THIS POINT IBRD HOLDS THE BEST CARDS AND SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO PLAY THEM.
STEARNS

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